

**Yuma County Department of Public Works Wellton North Material Source (AZA 31977)**

Dear Interested Party:

Please be advised that an Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared (EA-AZ-320-2005-009) for a proposed Free Use Permit (FUP) to Yuma County Department of Public Works. This EA is a public document, and it is available for your review and comment. The proposed action analyzed in the EA would include portions of the following described public lands:

Gila and Salt River Meridian, Yuma County, Arizona

T. 8 S., R. 18 W.,  
sec. 17, NW $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$  and NE $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$  (within).

The area described contains approximately 20.0 acres.

The intent of this EA is to analyze site specific environmental effects of a FUP to remove approximately 100,000 cubic yards of sand and gravel from approximately 10 acres of the existing pit and an additional 10 acres of previously undisturbed lands north of Wellton, Yuma County, over a 10-year term. The no action alternative would not authorize the proposed project. The proposed action is in conformance with the Yuma District Resource Management Plan (RMP) and its Record of Decision, as amended (May 1986 and February 1987).

Copies of the EA are available upon request from, and written comments may be submitted to: *Stephen Fusilier, 2555 E. Gila Ridge Road, Yuma, AZ 85365, (928) 317-3296*. This EA has also been posted on the Arizona State Office's web home page [http://www.az.blm.gov/env\\_docs/proj\\_list.htm](http://www.az.blm.gov/env_docs/proj_list.htm). The deadline for receipt of comments is August 31st. Public comments are welcome and encouraged.

By law, the names and addresses of those commenting are available for public review during regular business hours. However, individual commentors may request that their name and/or address be withheld from the record. These requests will be honored to the extent allowable by law. If you wish your name and/or address withheld, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your comment letter. All comments from organizations or businesses will be available for public inspection in their entirety.

Sincerely,  
Rebecca Heick  
Field Manager



# United States Department of the Interior

## BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Yuma Field Office  
2555 East Gila Ridge Road  
Yuma, AZ 85365  
[www.az.blm.gov](http://www.az.blm.gov)



### FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

#### For

**EA No. AZ-320-2005-009**

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Yuma Field Office, has analyzed a proposal from Yuma County for a Free Use Permit for the removal of an estimated 100,000 cubic yards of mineral materials from BLM lands near Wellton in Yuma County, AZ. Yuma County received a Free Use Permit on April 1, 2004 for the removal of 10,000 cubic yards within five acres of the proposed project site. The material would be used for maintenance projects on nearby County roads over the next 10 years. The FUP would be issued under the authority of Title III of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, as amended, and the Materials Act (Act of June 31, 1947, 30 U.S.C 601, *et seq.*). The proposed action and the No Action Alternative, are described within the attached Environmental Assessment (EA) No. AZ-320-2005-009.

The EA is tiered to and in conformance with the Yuma District Resource Management Plan (RMP) and its Record of Decision, as amended (May 1986 and February 1987). The above referenced documents may be viewed at the Yuma Field Office during normal business hours.

The proposed action would assure that no significant adverse impacts would occur to the human environment in the following areas: Air Quality, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Cultural Resources, Environmental Justice, Farm Lands (Prime or Unique), Floodplain, Hazardous or Solid Waste, Native American Religious Concerns, Non-Native Invasive Species, Threatened or Endangered Species, Water Quality (Ground or Surface), Wetlands/Riparian Zones, Wild and Scenic Rivers, or Wilderness.

The proposed action does not significantly affect energy supply, distribution, and/or use and therefore a Statement of Adverse Energy Impact is not required.

On the basis of the information contained in the EA, and all other information available to me as is summarized above, it is my determination that the Proposed Action does not constitute a major Federal Action affecting the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is unnecessary and will not be prepared.

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Rebecca Heick  
Yuma Field Manager

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Date

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
EA-AZ-320-2005-009**

**FOR**

**YUMA COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS  
WELLTON NORTH MATERIAL SOURCE  
AZA 31977**

**TOWNSHIP 8 SOUTH, RANGE 18 WEST, SECTION 17  
YUMA COUNTY, ARIZONA**

**Prepared For:**

**Bureau of Land Management  
Yuma Field Office  
2555 East Gila Ridge Road  
Yuma, AZ 85365-2240**

**Prepared By:**

**Himes Consulting LLC  
3272 West Venice Way  
Chandler, AZ 85226**

**July 2005**

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## **1.1 BACKGROUND**

Yuma County has requested a Free Use Permit from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for the removal of an estimated 100,000 cubic yards of mineral materials from BLM lands near Wellton in Yuma County, AZ. The material would be used for maintenance projects on County roads over the next 10 years. Yuma County received a Free Use Permit on April 1, 2004 for the removal of 10,000 cubic yards within five acres of the proposed project site.

## **1.2 PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION**

The purpose of the action is to enable Yuma County to continue to mine mineral materials and expand the existing Wellton North pit for use on Yuma County road maintenance projects.

## **1.3 CONFORMANCE WITH LAND USE PLANS**

The proposed action is in conformance with the Yuma District Resource Management Plan (RMP) and its Record of Decision, as amended (May 1986 and February 1987), (page 13 – “The District would attempt to meet demands for common variety mineral materials, including sand, gravel and clay, through sale or free use permits on a case-by-case basis

## **1.4 RELATED ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENTS (EIS), ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS (EA), AND OTHER RELEVANT DOCUMENTS**

This Environmental Assessment (EA) is tiered to the Yuma District Programmatic EA, No. AZ-050-78-26.

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**PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES**

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**2.1 PROPOSED ACTION**

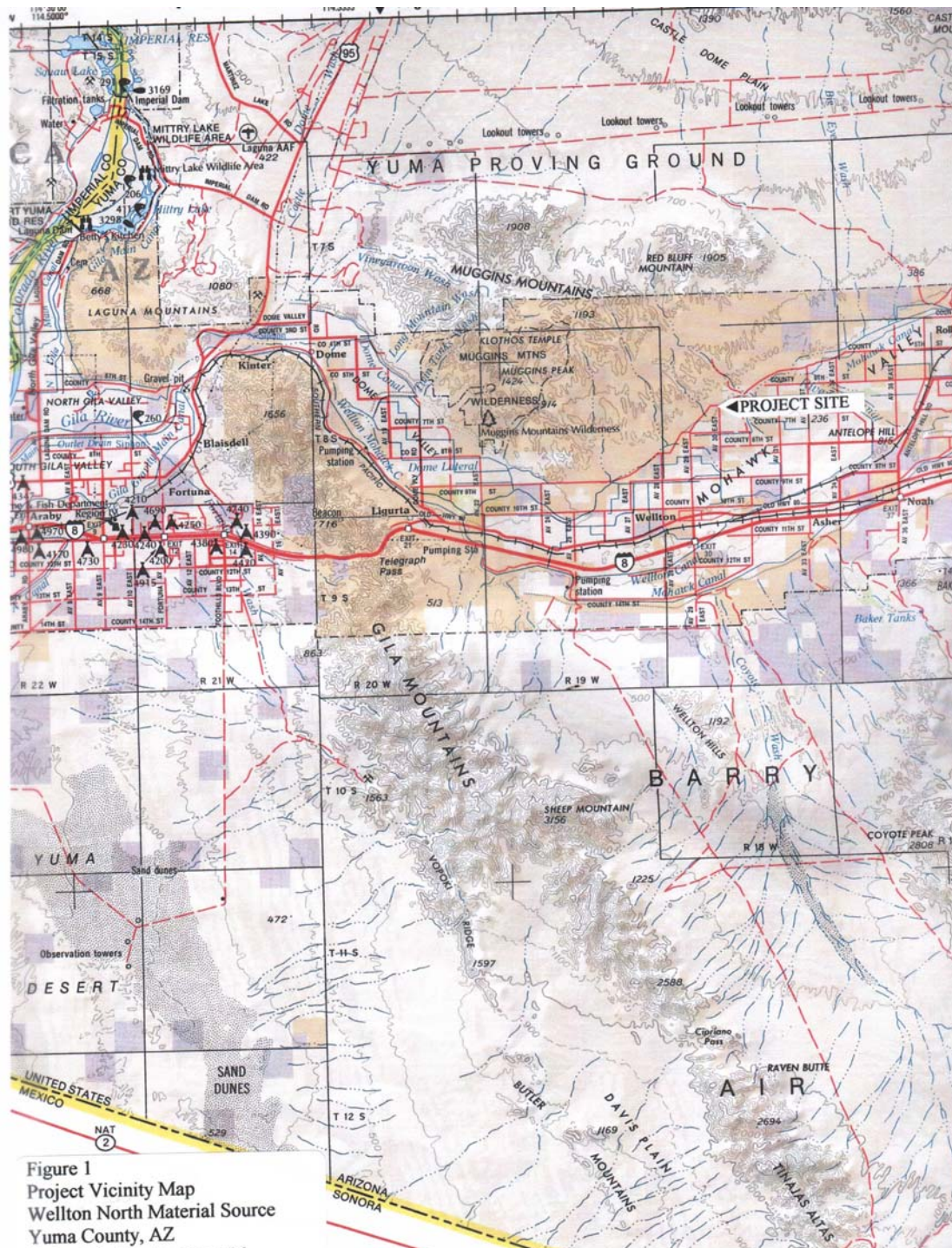
Yuma County has requested a Free Use Permit to remove approximately 100,000 cubic yards of sand & gravel from approximately 10 acres of the existing pit and an additional 10 acres of previously undisturbed lands north of Wellton, Yuma County, over a 10-year term. A vicinity map of the project area is provided in Figure 1. The affected lands are described as follows:

Gila and Salt River Meridian, Yuma County, Arizona  
T. 8 S., R. 18 W.,  
Sec. 17, NW $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$  (within); NE $\frac{1}{4}$  SE $\frac{1}{4}$  (within).

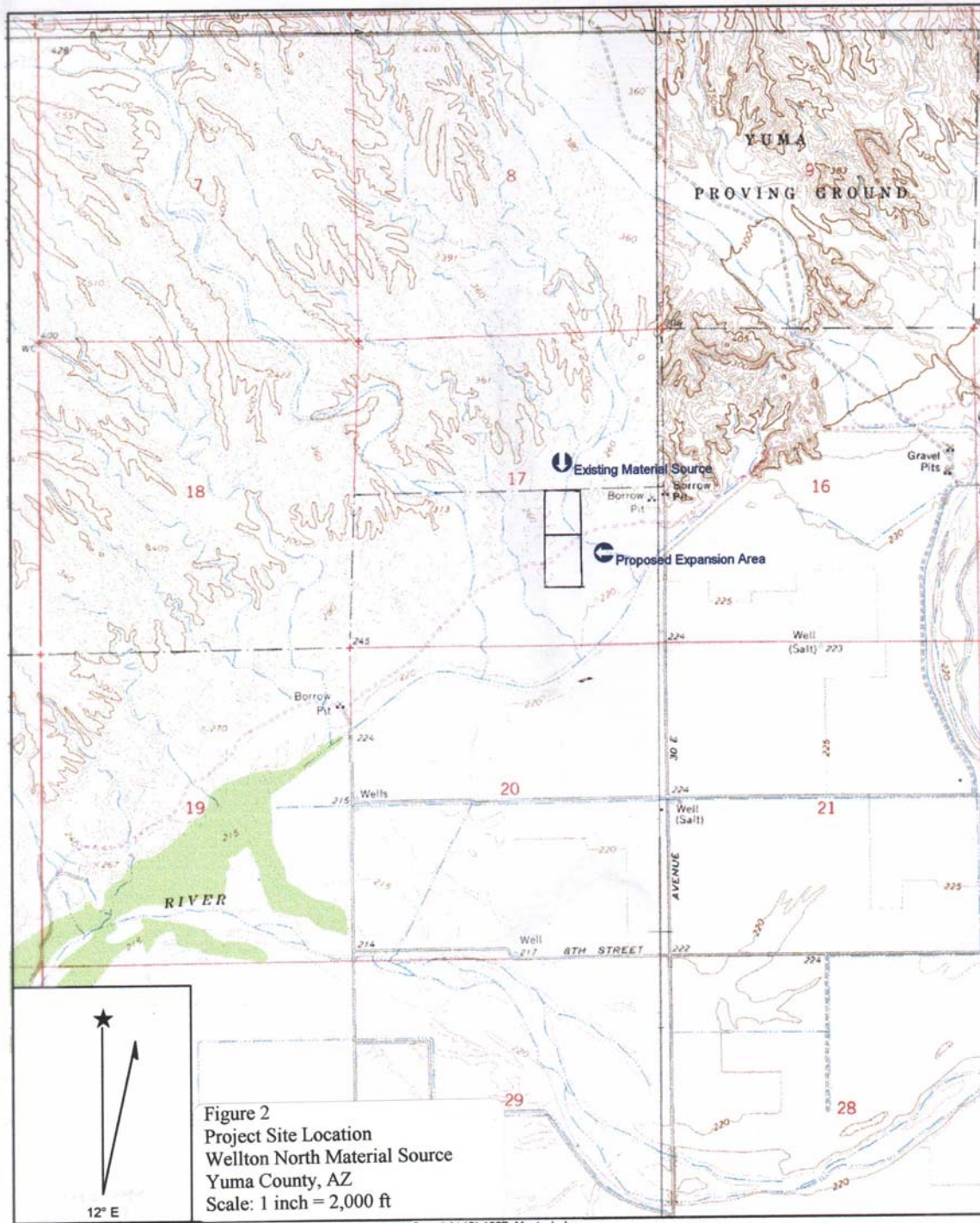
The area described contains approximately 20.0 acres.

The proposed permit area would encompass 20 acres, more or less. The location of the project site is shown in Figure 2. The project consists of mining and stockpiling materials, and transporting to the maintenance location using the existing access road. If approved, Yuma County would be required to comply with the following mitigating measures:

1. Any archaeological, historical, or paleontological remains discovered by the permittee, or any person working on the permittee's behalf, on public or Federal land shall be immediately reported to the Authorized Officer. All operations in the immediate area of such discovery shall be suspended until written authorization to proceed is issued by the Authorized Officer.
2. All firewood (vegetative material greater than three inches in diameter) shall be stockpiled in a place readily accessible by truck. The remaining brush shall be piled in piles less than three feet tall and no greater than 10 ft in diameter. These piles shall be placed in the reclaimed portions of the permitted areas.
3. The permittee shall furnish and apply water or use other means satisfactory to the Authorized Officer for dust control.







4. The site shall be maintained in a sanitary condition at all times; waste materials shall be disposed of promptly at an appropriate waste disposal site. "Waste" is defined as all discarded matter including, but not limited to, human waste, trash, garbage, refuse, oil drums, petroleum products, ashes, and equipment.
5. Public hazards caused by the operations shall be prevented by signs and/or appropriate fencing.
6. All applicable terms and stipulations of Standard Form 3600-9 and standard Yuma District material removal stipulations will apply.
7. Upon cessation of operations, the pit shall be scarified to a depth of 12 inches by rippers spaced 12 inches apart, in order to reduce compaction. Pit walls shall be maintained or graded to a final slope of 3:1 (horizontal : vertical).
8. If a desert tortoise is found in a project area, activities should be modified to avoid injuring or harming it. If activities cannot be modified, tortoises shall be moved from harm's way. Upon discovery of a desert tortoise in harm's way, the authorized biologist shall translocate the animal the minimum distance possible (but not more than two miles) within appropriate habitat to ensure its safety from death, injury, or collection associated with the project or other activities. The authorized biologist shall be allowed some discretion to ensure that survival of each relocated desert tortoise is likely. Desert tortoises shall not be translocated to lands outside the administration of the Federal government without the written permission of the landowner.

Only biologists authorized by the BLM and the appropriate State Fish and Game Department shall handle desert tortoises. Handling procedures for desert tortoises shall adhere to protocols outlined in the *Management Plan for the Sonoran Desert Population of the Desert Tortoise in Arizona* (December 1996).

## **2.2 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE**

Alternatives to the proposed action consist of the No Action Alternative, which consists of not issuing a Free Use Permit to Yuma County for the Wellton North pit by the BLM. Yuma County would not be able to repair County roads with material from this source.

### **3.1 GENERAL SETTING**

The Wellton North Material Source project site is southeast of the Muggins Mountains, approximately one mile north and one mile east of the Gila River. Elevation at the project site is approximately 260 ft above mean sea level (msl). The Yuma Proving Ground occurs immediately north of the project site. The existing material source operation occurs in the northern half of the project site.

The area within the existing material source operation is previously-disturbed through mining (open pit), stockpiling, and grading. The proposed 10-acre expansion area is largely undisturbed, with some areas of disturbance from off-road vehicle use. Topography in the undeveloped portion of the site is relatively flat, with a slight downward slope to the southeast. Land use includes sand and gravel mining, off-road vehicle use, open space, and wildlife habitat.

Climate in the project area is typical of the arid southwest, which is characterized by long, hot summers and mild winters. Average annual rainfall is approximately three inches.

### **3.2 CULTURAL/ARCHAEOLOGICAL**

Previously recorded cultural resource sites within a one mile radius of the proposed project area include an old dump site and a site of unknown attributes. Transcon Environmental conducted a Class III cultural resources survey of the project area in October 2004. One archaeological site, designated AZ X:8:107 (ASM), and no isolated artifacts or features were found within the project area (Transcon Environmental 2004). The site consists of one cleared area, one rock feature, four trail segments, three pieces of quartz, and two or three disturbed possible features. The site is recommended as not eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, and no further preservation treatment is recommended.

### **3.3 VISUAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

The project area is within the Visual Resource Management Class IV. Class IV lands may contain contrasts to the basic landscape elements caused by the management action

which make high levels of change to the existing landscape. The visual setting in the project area is dominated by the Muggins Mountains to the north, the Gila River to the south, and the existing borrow pit excavations within in the northern portion of the project area and to the east. The existing mining operations are not visible from Interstate 8.

### **3.4 VEGETATION AND WILDLIFE**

Vegetation communities within the project vicinity are described as Lower Colorado River subdivision of the Sonoran Desert by Brown (1994). Biological surveys of the project site were conducted by J. Himes on October 12, 2004. Vegetation within the undeveloped portions of the project site is characterized by shrubby mesquite (*Prosopis juliflora*), four-wing saltbush (*Atriplex canescens*), brittlebush (*Encelia farinosa*), and an occasional ironwood (*Olneya tesota*) and paloverde (*Cercidium floridum*).

Wildlife and/or wildlife sign observed in the project area include black-tailed jackrabbit (*Lepus californicus*), mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), and white-throated woodrat (*Neotoma albigula*). Wildlife typical of Lower Colorado River subdivision also anticipated to occur in the area includes coyote (*Canis latrans*), round-tailed ground squirrel (*Spermophilus tereticaudus*), desert pocket mouse (*Perognathus penicillatus*), and a variety of snakes and lizards.

### **3.5 THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES**

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) was contacted for a list of federally-listed, proposed, and candidate species which may occur in Yuma County. The BLM's Sensitive Species List (October 2000) of sensitive species which occur in the Yuma Resource Area was also reviewed. The Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) was contacted to access the Heritage Data Management System. Based on the review of species lists and existing habitat information, there is no potential for federally-listed species to occur within the activity area.

### **3.6 SOILS/MINERALS**

Both the surface and subsurface minerals are under federal ownership. Surface soils within the northern portion of the site have been previously removed during operations. Both the surface and subsurface minerals are under federal ownership. The National Resources Conservation Service has described soils within the project site as Ligurta-

Cristobal complex (Soil Conservation Service 1980). The Ligurta soils comprise about 50 percent of the complex and the Cristobal soil about 35 percent. The Cristobal soil is similar to the Ligurta soil but is 30 to 90 percent coarse fragments. Tremant gravelly loam, Antho sandy loam, Carrizo very gravelly sand, and small areas of calcareous, very gravelly loams comprise the remaining 15 percent of the complex. Typically, Ligurta and Cristobal soils have a surface layer of very pale brown very gravelly loam about 2 inches thick.

### **3.6 GRAZING**

No grazing occurs within or near the proposed project area (Mr. Roger Oyler, BLM, personal communication, 2004).

### **3.7 WILD HORSES AND BURROS**

Wild horses and burros do not occur within or near the project area (Mr. Roger Oyler, BLM, personal communication, 2004). Evidence of wild horses or burros was not observed during site surveys on October 12, 2004.

### **3.8 FLOODPLAINS**

A portion of the existing material source and the proposed project site is located within the 100-year floodplain of the Gila River according to the FEMA Floodplain Map (FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Map Panel No. 0400990775B). Past operations at the existing pit may have altered the active floodplain in the project area through materials excavation.

### **3.9 AIR QUALITY**

Air quality in the project vicinity is usually high due to the remoteness from urban areas, but may decline for short periods because of blowing dust from unpaved roadways and agricultural burning in the vicinity. The project site is not located within a PM<sub>10</sub> non-attainment area.

### **3.10 HAZARDOUS MATERIALS**

No hazardous materials were observed during the site visit in October 2004.

### **3.11 INVASIVE, NON-NATIVE SPECIES**

There are four invasive, non-native species of concern in the vicinity of the proposed project: Sahara mustard (*Brassica tourneforti*), buffelgrass (*Pennisetum cillare*), Bermuda grass (*Cynodon dactylon*), and tamarisk (*Tamarix* sp.). No noxious weeds or invasive species were observed within the project area.

### **3.12 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE**

Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice directs that programs, policies, and activities not have a disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effect on minority and low-income populations. Low-income and minority populations are present within Yuma County. The community center of Wellton, mainly an agricultural center, is located approximately six miles northeast of the proposed project site. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (2000), 40.7 percent of the population in Wellton is Hispanic and 21 percent of the population is at poverty level.

### **3.13 NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGIOUS CONCERNS**

The Bureau of Land Management has initiated consultation for this project. The results of this consultation will be incorporated into the final Environmental Assessment.

#### **4.1 IMPACTS FROM THE PROPOSED ACTION**

The following critical elements were not present or would not be affected by the proposed action:

- Wetlands/riparian
- Prime or unique farmlands
- Wild and scenic rivers
- Native American religious concerns
- Grazing
- Cultural resources
- Threatened or endangered species
- Wild Horses or Burros
- Wilderness

##### **4.1.1 CULTURAL/ARCHAEOLOGICAL**

No impacts would occur to historic properties from the proposed action. The archaeological site is not recommended as eligible for listing on the NRHP and no further preservation treatment is recommended (Transcon Environmental 2004).

##### **4.1.2 VISUAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

The proposed action would be consistent with the objectives for Visual Resource Management Class IV. Proposed changes to the existing character of the landscape can be high. The continuation of mining operations would not be visible from the Muggins Mountains Wilderness Area, located approximately five miles northwest of the project site.

##### **4.1.3 VEGETATION AND WILDLIFE**

Existing vegetation within the undisturbed portion of the project site would be removed during the mining process. Once mining is completed, reclamation of the material source would be scarified to allow natural revegetation. Native cactus, including barrel cactus, would be avoided to the degree possible. If avoidance is not possible, then these plants

would be transplanted to adjacent public lands outside of the project area or other BLM-approved locations.

Wildlife within the proposed project area would be displaced during proposed project activities. Wildlife would be anticipated to return to the project area following reclamation and revegetation of the area.

#### **4.1.4 THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES**

As there are no federally-listed threatened or endangered plant and species which occur within or near the project site, no impacts to federally-listed species would occur from the proposed project.

Development of the proposed project site would impact 10 acres of potential foraging habitat for four BLM sensitive bat species: the big free-tailed bat, the cave myotis, the California leaf-nosed bat, and the pocketed free-tailed bat. Based on the abundance of similar habitat types within the surrounding areas, impacts would not be anticipated to adversely impact these species on a regional basis.

Development of the project would reduce 10 acres of potential habitat for four BLM sensitive species: the cheeseweed moth lacewing, the chuckwalla, the rosy boa, and the loggerhead shrike. Based on the abundance of similar habitat types within the surrounding areas, project impacts would not be anticipated to adversely impact the species on a regional basis.

#### **4.1.5 SOILS/MINERALS**

Construction and operation of the proposed action could result in the disturbance and alteration of an additional 10 acres of undisturbed native soil and underlying minerals. Impacts to native soil and minerals would result from the clearing of protective vegetation, excavation of materials, and the associated loss of soil productivity in undisturbed areas.

Dust control would be provided on cleared areas on an as-needed basis to reduce dust generation and off-site deposition of soils from the project site. Scarification of project areas during reclamation would reduce impacts to soils over the long-term.



#### **4.1.6 GRAZING**

As no grazing occurs in the project vicinity, no loss of Animal Unit Months would occur from implementation of the proposed action.

#### **4.1.7 WILD HORSES AND BURROS**

As wild horses and burros do not occur in the project vicinity, no impacts would occur to wild horses and burros from the proposed action.

#### **4.1.8 FLOODPLAINS**

The proposed action would temporarily impact the designated floodplain area through excavation. The excavated areas are anticipated to refill with material from stormwater flows over time, thereby restoring floodplain conditions.

#### **4.1.9 AIR QUALITY**

Short-term impacts to air quality would occur locally during excavation, processing, and hauling. Dust control would reduce these impacts during operation. Impacts to local air quality would be reduced over the long-term by the reclamation activities at the site. The project site is not located within a PM<sub>10</sub> non-attainment area.

#### **4.1.10 HAZARDOUS MATERIALS**

No hazardous materials were observed during site surveys of the project area. Operations would require the use of small amounts of hazardous materials (such as oil, grease, and anti-freeze). However, good housekeeping procedures would be used during operations to minimize the potential for a spill. All materials would be removed following completion of operations.

#### **4.1.11 INVASIVE, NONNATIVE SPECIES**

Invasive, nonnative species of concern were not observed during surveys of the proposed project site. Implementation of the proposed action is not anticipated to result in adverse impacts regarding invasive, non-native species.

#### **4.1.12 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE**

The proposed project area is relatively isolated due to its remote location immediately adjacent to the Yuma Proving Ground. As no residences occur in the project vicinity, low-income and minority populations in Wellton would not be adversely impacted by the proposed action.

#### **4.1.13 NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGIOUS CONCERNS**

The Bureau of Land Management has initiated consultation for this project. The results of this consultation will be incorporated into the final Environmental Assessment.

### **4.2 IMPACTS FROM THE NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE**

Implementation of the No Action Alternative would result in a Free Use Permit being denied for the project site and no disturbance would occur within the proposed project area. As the need for materials for repair of County roads would not be fulfilled, Yuma County would need to find other material sources in the vicinity for their use.

### **4.3 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS**

The proposed action would result in the extraction of up to 100,000 cubic yards of sand and gravel from the proposed project site over a 10-year period. The proposed action would add up to 10 acres of new disturbance to the previous disturbances in Yuma County. With this and other similar actions proposed by Yuma County, up to a total of approximately 110 acres of new disturbance would occur and potentially up to 1,600,000 cubic yards of material would be removed. New disturbance would add cumulatively to short-term impacts in the project vicinity, including impacts to soils, vegetation & wildlife, visual resources, and localized air quality. Reclamation would occur at the end of mining operations, which would aid in the long-term recovery of the project site. Implementation of the proposed action is therefore not expected to result in adverse cumulative impacts over the long-term.

**CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION**

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The following persons and agencies were contacted or consulted during preparation of this EA:

Federal

U.S. Department of Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Rob Wilson

U.S. Department of the Interior

Bureau of Land Management, Yuma Field Office:

Stephen Fusilier, Team Lead, Lands and Minerals

Matthew Plis, Geologist

Sandra Arnold, Archaeologist

Jennifer Green, Natural Resource Specialist

Karen Reichhart, NEPA Coordinator

Roger Oyler, Rangeland Management Specialist

Ron Morfin, Visual Resource Management Specialist

Jeff Young, Wildlife Biologist

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

State

Arizona Department of Game and Fish

Arizona State Historic Preservation Office

**REFERENCES**

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Arizona Interagency Desert Tortoise Team. December 1996. Management Plan for the Sonoran Desert Population of the Desert Tortoise in Arizona.

Brown, David E., 1994. Biotic Communities, Southwestern United States and Northwestern Mexico. University of Utah Press; Salt Lake City.

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Himes Consulting LLC. 2004. Biological Evaluation for the Wellton North Material Source, Yuma County. Prepared for Yuma County. October.

USDA Soil Conservation Service. 1980. Soil Survey of Yuma-Wellton Area. Parts of Yuma County, Arizona and Imperial County, California. In Cooperation with the Arizona Agricultural Experiment Station and the California Agricultural Experiment Station.

Transcon Environmental. 2004. A Class III Cultural Resources Survey of Bureau of Land Management Administered Land in the Vicinity of Wellton, Yuma County, AZ. BLM Cultural Resource Project Record No. BLM-AZ-050-2004-075.

Federal Emergency Management Agency. Flood Insurance Rate Maps. [www.fema.gov/mapstore](http://www.fema.gov/mapstore)